ACADEMIC BROADCASTING

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I am to speak to you on Academic Broadcasting. I use that phrase to cover broadcasting by members of college and university faculties. I have no idea how much academic broadcasting there is in this country; but I have the strong conviction, that if it is well done, the more there is of it the better.

Before turning your attention to details, I wish to take this chance to express my lively appreciation for NAEB. Its efforts to put academic broadcasters in touch with listeners all over the nation are all to the good. For over ten years now I have been having an affair with the academic microphone; but no matter how sedulously I paid court to the lady, we never got beyond the range of the university station. And then along came NAEB, and before I knew it I was talking to listeners in states all over the union. Write-in mail began turning up from "far-away places with strange-sounding names". If you have mike-fever, there is a thrill in this. So I wish NAEB good luck, green lights, straight-aways, bon voyage, happy landing, and anything else it needs to keep it plugging away at its job.

I shall divide what I have to say into two parts. The first part is addressed to college and university administrators and station directors; persons whose business it is to use men, money and materials to a certain end. It is important that such persons have ideas about academic broadcasting, and that these ideas be out of the right drawer. My point is not that they should have these ideas in order that they may themselves do effective academic broadcasting. In many cases, the further they stay away from the mike, the happier everyone is going to be. My point is that they alone can give academic broadcasting the conditions which make it worthwhile. In this respect they are comparable to producers and directors among movie people. To these indispensible "providers" I would say eight things. If these eight points strike you as trivial or obvious, then either you operate in an academic radio paradise, or you are insufficiently aware of the importance of what you consider trivial and obvious.

(1) My first point is this: after the student-body and the football team, a good academic radio program is a university's best single public-relations investment. I would place it in many ways above an extension service. It does more than any other one agency to give reality to the nation of a "state-wide campus." It is there many hours each day. It is there many months each year. It gets into lives and homes with an intimacy which even class-rooms do not always generate. I have been flabbergasted to discover, in remote towns and villages, in isolated farms and camps, how persistently and respectvully and gratefully people maintain contact with their university radio. They wouldn't want it all day long. They wouldn't want only academic broadcasting. But they can learn to trust it for quality, to bring their minds as well as their ears when they tune it in. It is reassuring to realize that there is one station which doesn't want your money, doesn't want to sell you something, doesn't want to make you laugh or put you in touch with the front page of your newspaper. It is

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* A full report of the meeting, together with a copy of the speech by Dr. Harry Newburn, president of the Educational TV and Radio Center, will be distributed as soon as it is available.

simply good business, good public relations, for a university to stand in this sort of relation to the radio public.

(2) The rest of my points assume the general truth of what I have just said. They go on to note that there is a price-tag, indeed several price-tags, on a good academic broadcasting program, and to ask whether administrators and directors acknowledge these price-tags, and think about them as frequently and vividly as they can. For example, ten years of academic broadcasting has taught me one rule which it is mike-folly to ignore; namely, that after all preparatory reading and study is over, it takes one hour to produce an effective five-minute script. There will be exceptions to this, but they are exceedingly rare. When they come along, you are thankful for them, but you never count on them. An administrator or a director who doesn't know that that is what he is asking for, is ignorant of the basic human cost of his commodity. That ratio, one hour's work to produce an effective five-minute script, does not alter as the script lengthens. If you are going to hold the mike's attention for ten minutes, set aside two hours; if for fifteen minutes, set aside three hours; if for thirty minutes, set aside six hours. For one academic year I was assigned to fill thirty minutes three times a week. That cost me eighteen hours every week. It made no difference whether you wrote the script out and read it, or thought it out and practically memorized, or worked from a note outline. It was still an hour's work to produce five minutes effective talk. I would repeat that this hour comes <u>after</u> all your preliminary reading and study is over.

(3) I can come at my next point this way. Academic broadcasting, once you realize its possibilities and demands, is hard and exacting business. In the professorial life there are few things to compare it with. No class-room is as hard to catch and hold as a mike. No class-room uses up your material as fast and inevitably as a mike. There are ways of stalling for time in a class-room, most of them useless to try on a mike. The mike merely turns a cold metallic eye on your script and says: "You are ill-prepared"; or, "You haven't enough there to last out"; or, "You have too much there for the amount of time you've got." As I said, academic broadcasting, once you realize its possibilities and demands, is hard and exacting business. Why then do universities make no allowances on teaching loads for conscientious and effective academic broadcasting? I have never heard of this being done. Why not? In these matters as in others, the laborer is worthy of his hire. Why do universities persistently exploit the fact that a man who relishes academic broadcasting can be left to sweat his fool head off?

(4) Why are stations, or the universities in back of them, so stingy when it comes to mimeographing scripts? This is an old gripe of mine. If a script is worth the work it takes to produce it and broadcast it, why is it not worth the extra cost needed to mimeograph it for distribution? Not to see this is a rebuke to the vanity and self-esteem of the broadcaster; and, as a count against it, that's not hay. It is also a let-down to the write-in people who think enough of what the station is putting out, to ask personally for a copy. It is a missed opportunity on the part of the university to drive home the fact that <u>it</u> stands back of the show and is pleased that its customers want its wares. My <u>files</u> are stuffed with letters asking for a copy of the script. And, except in cases which do nothing to mitigate this near-sighted policy, the answers have always had to be "Sorry; no can do." I am not alone in this. This is a matter which, soon or late, comes up for beefing whenever academic broadcasters are talking things over.

(5) I have yet to hear of a university radio station, that maintains a "talent scout". Why not? On our campus the students' daily newspaper does not

leave its business to chance. It has "news scouts." They swarm over the place like flies. Every week they pay a routine call and pump you for what they call "items." If they hear you are up to something, they have you on the phone before you can turn around. Campus news is their business. Now, by analogy, lecture talent is a station's business. I often visit other men's classes. More than once I have stumbled onto a lecture which was a "natural" for an academic mike. With a new head and tail it could have been lifted right out of the course and stood on its own. Whose business is it to know about such things? You can't expect the lecturer to realize that he has come forth (perhaps by accident) with a talk suited to the needs of the station. Even less can you expect him to come around and ask to be "taped" while he still has it where he can handle it. More than once I have had a strong hunch that Professor So-and-so, regardless of the lecture he might be putting out, has potential mike-talent. Whose business is it to keep after these things? Why isn't a campus kept under constant sensitive surveillance? No football coach, no campus editor, is as happy-go-lucky as some station directors I have known. How many program directors go out and shunt for their talent? How many have student assistants out in the field "spotting" for them?

(6) For what it is worth, I would urge upon universities and their stations the great utility of tapes. This used to be a sore point with me. I was against tapes. I thought they resulted in "canned" goods. But I was wrong about this. With a little coaching a person can be trained to warm up even to a tape. They are flexible as to time and place. They are storable. They are revisable. They are like cameras--doing their take and salting it away. I see less and less need for "live" broadcasting in academic affairs.

(7)Having said this, I would add that one of the great values of a tape is that it lets a person listen to a play-back as soon as he is through. This is a point which cannot be over-emphasized. Always urge a man to sit through a play-back as soon as he has come away from the mike. Never make him feel that this is either a bother or a mere routine. If it is a "bother", you have a wrong perspective. If it is a"mere routine," he has a wrong perspective. There is nothing that will teach a man the things he needs to know as quickly and surely as a play-back. If he has done well, but thinks otherwise, it will help to restore his nerve. If he has done poorly, but thinks otherwise, it will confront him with the facts. If you know how to help him, the play-back provides you with documentary evidence for your points. A play-back, in the hands of a sympathetic and skillful program director has many of the virtues of a "confessional". Many a time I have come away from such ordeals with a heightened sense of sin but with a determination to do better next time.

(8) My last point to administrators and directors has to do with a matter upon which I have had little first-hand experience but upon which I have done thinking. I mean academic television. Right now I think this is an overrated potentiality. I am convinced that when a university adds a radio station it adds far more to its resources than it will when it adds television to its radio. A university without radio is drastically cut off. A university with radio but without television is not drastically cut off. A university can do a great deal for its customers, given broadcasting facilities. But the nature of its clientele and the nature of its materials are such that not as much proportionately is added when you pass from broadcasting to television. A university station lives by its appeal to the minds of its listeners. To do this at least one sense medium is essential. When you add a second sense (in this case vision) you encounter diminishing returns. When I learned what it cost one university to add television I could not help wondering whether the returns were worth the added investment; and I could not help thinking how some or all of that money

might have been spent to improve and extend the station's broadcasting resources.

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I want now to shift from administrators and directors to faculty colleagues as academic broadcasters. If academic broadcasting is to be a reality, it will be because they make it so. Unless they have "the will to broadcast", their station will be little more than an administrative play-toy. When Professor Perry at Harvard wrote his autobiography he called it "And gladly teach." You can borrow that phrase. It must be, or become possible to say "and gladly broadcast." Without that, academic broadcasting will get no real status. I would have such persons think along two lines: as to choosing a subject; and as to handling it.

(1) As to a choice of subject, these five suggestions. (a) first, what I call the "magic platitude": choose something which you can make both interesting and valuable. Neither alone is enough. If you can't make the subject interesting, leave it alone. Avoid boring your listeners as you would avoid the plague. If they cannot say later "You know, I heard an interesting broadcast the other day," you have lost Round One. But you must aim at more than that. To make your subject interesting is necessary, but it is not sufficient. You must also make it valuable. This distinction is quite real. It is one thing to say "I heard an interesting broadcast"; it is another thing to say "I heard a valuable broadcast." Over the years academic broadcasting must include the second in its aim. The people who listen to academic broadcasting are people who are capable of value-judgments. Never forget that fact about them. If you do, they will forget about you. I have referred to this mandatory combination ("interesting and valuable") as "the magic platitude." It is just that. It is a platitude. What could be more of a platitude? But it is magic, also. I say that because its results are nothing short of magic; also because I know of no scientific rules for stating it. To say "Be interesting and valuable or be off" is good advice. To say "This is how to make your stuff interesting and valuable" is to invoke something of an art, something that throws you back upon intuitions, something that goes into the making of poems and the painting of pictures and the telling of stories. These considerations however do not disqualify the ideal. The persisting ideal here is qualitative. It defines for you the character of your excellence.

(b) you can do more with the magic platitude than merely state it. You can say, for example, "choose a topic upon which feeling is strong but about which reflection is not usual though it is profitable." That statement goes a long way to defining a good topic for academic broadcasting. There must be something about your topic which taps the feeling, the concern, of your listeners. You get nowhere by plugging in on indifference. When I say "feeling" I do not mean "emotion." I do not mean that academic broadcasting to be interesting and valuable must play on the emotions of its listeners. It must tap matters upon which they feel strongly in the sense of having strong convictions. But that was not all. "Upon which feeling is strong but about which reflection is not usual," or has not carried them far. This gives your power of reflection an area in which to spark, an area of dry timber which has not been burned over. Under those circumstances you can start a fire in their minds. That was still not all. "Upon which feeling is strong but about which reflection is not usual though it is profitable." That last clause is important too. There is no point to blazing a trail which leads nowhere. Your powers of reflection must open up things which your listener's mind would have gotten around to had he brought his powers of thinking to bear upon it. Your topic matters to him, but he has not thought too much about it. You get him to think about it along lines

which he would have moved had he put his mind to it. If you can do that, he will find you both interesting and valuable. And he will be waiting for you any time his leisure permits.

(c) What I have just said suggests another approach to the "magic platitude." Choose a matter upon which you have genuine feelings; and about which you know more and have thought harder than your listener. This does not mean "talk down" to him. Few things are worse than that. But he must feel that you are worth listening to. He must feel that you have something which he hasn't. Otherwise your ideas are, as the French say, "deja vues", old hat. In a perfectly unobjectionable sense of the words, he must feel that you are superior to him in respect to your topic. It is fatal to be so "folksy" that a listener who lets you into his mind for half an hour feels no pressures while you are there, feels in nowise "stretched" after you are gone. That would not be academic broadcasting as I understand the term. There is no place here for Jack Benny or Arthur Godfrey. You have a part to play and your best chance of playing it well is to have a subject which has laid hold on your own mind, about which you know more and have thought harder than your listener.

(2) My first piece of advice was: Pick a topic which you can make both interesting and valuable. (a) My second is this: Learn to read from a script as though you were talking; and learn to write such scripts. I have strong convictions on this. There are in academic broadcasting two things which are an abomination. One is the man who is trying to ad lib his stuff. The other is the man who is reading his script and sound like it. I don't know which is worse. Several perils attend the first man. He may wander around. He may become repetitious. He may fall into seconds of silence or uh-ing and ah-ing. He may talk himself out before his time is up and start padding. He may be only part way through when his time is up and start cutting corners. He may be unnerved by the impersonality of the mike and become stilted and strained; or try to offset this by getting "folksy" and "anecdotal." He may start listening to the sound of his own voice. These are all bad. They have all happened to me, and the memory of them brings out a cold sweat. And the point is, they are all unnecessary. A properly concocted script, worked at until you can read it as though you were talking it, is all that is needed. There are two matters here. It must be properly concocted. It must be written as you would talk when you are doing normal straightforward academic talking. This does not mean "written as you would write an article." A radio script is not at all the same as a manuscript. It must fit your personality more closely. It must be less packed and more expressive. It has a place for short sentences; for rhetorical questions; for homely idiom; for racy metaphor; for the first person singular; for passages you would normally say with a smile or a frown or a look of puzzlement. The point is, a script must be written to be talked. When read aloud it must not sound as though it were written to be read. This is a knack. Any self-respecting academic who wants to broadcast can learn to do it. There are two steps. One, you learn to write as you would normally talk; two, you learn to read what you have thus written as though you were talking and not reading. This takes a little self-knowledge, a little rewriting, and rather more than a little practice at making your tongue say what your eye sees, in the manner that you speak when you talk.

(b) Anything else I can say is secondary to that. But for what they are worth, I shall close with a few miscellaneous do's and don'ts. (1) Never undertake less that fifteen minutes or more than thirty minues. There is a certain solidity to the subject-matter of academic broadcasting. It is not news or anecdotes or jokes. It doesn't come in less than fifteen minute packages. It normally contains exposition, description, narration, argument, criticism; and these take time. It is addressed to the mind, and it takes time to involve a listener's mind

in what you want to say. These very things which make less than fifteen minutes too little, make more than thirty minutes too much. If you are working your listener as hard as he has a right to expect, don't ask him to stay with you beyond thirty minutes. Demand close listening; but don't demand it for more than thirty minutes, because you won't get it. (2) Presuppose as close to nothing as you can. Supply what your listener has to have to follow you. This may cramp your style; but put up with the cramps, if you want listeners. This is not to say that your listeners are ignorant. They aren't; but they don't have your specialized knowledge and they haven't given as much thought to your topic as you have. Your language is esoteric. Your information is esoteric. Your pattern of thought is esoteric. These are obstacles to be overcome. (3) Don't attempt "academic serials." Assume that you are playing a one-night stand, even if you aren't. A studio is not a class room. When you dismiss a class on Monday there is a reasonable presumption that it will return for more on Wednesday and Friday. You cannot assume that about a radio audience. Whatever your point is, you must get it across here and now. You cannot say "This will become clearer as we proceed", or "your outside reading will development my point for you." (3) Do not seek to edify or exhort. There is nothing wrong with edification or exhortion; but they are not your assignement. Your business is to interest, to inform, to clarify, to challenge, to criticize, to invite minds to range wider and deeper, to raise questions of principle, to point out presuppositions. These are the stock-in-trade of academic broadcasting. They are worth going after for their own sakes. You are an academic, not an ecclesiastic or a politician. This does not mean "be cynical", or "be neutral on everything", or "be coldly impersonal." It means consider your listeners as minds or intellects to be informed, not as wills to be shaped or souls to be saved. (4) Remember always that you are not addressing a captive audience. This is one of the small number of ways in which the studio differs crucially from the class-room. You may lose touch with your students but normally they continue to sit there. They can't tune you out. Until the bell rings there is little they can do about you. But you don't have that kind of hold one your radio audience. They don't have to stay with you; and, what is more, they don't have to pass your tests. With them you are up against free men. You must keep it coming and keep it good. (5) Remember also, that between your mind and the minds you are addressing there is only your voice and their ears. This is another crucial difference between studio and class-room. In a manner of speaking, your listeners are stone blind. What difference would it make to you in class if your students were all blind? The force of this analogy was brought home to me once when I had a blind boy in class. I accosted him one day in the corridor and asked "How are things coming on? Everything alright?" He said "As well as can be expected." The tone of his voice led me to say, "What do you mean, 'As well as can be expected'?" "Well,"he said, "all I can do is hear your voice. I can't see your face. I can't see what you put on the board. When you draw diagrams or jot down phrases--and you do a lot of that--I lose touch. In fact, being in class is something like listening to the radio." He made my point in that last remark.

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